

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR TOM HARKIN (D-IA)
ON THE *STEM CELL RESEARCH ENHANCEMENT ACT***

MAY 4, 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. - At a press conference today, Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), top Democrat on the committee that funds health care initiatives, gave the following statement calling for an immediate vote on the *Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act* (H.R. 810):

“We are rapidly approaching the one-year anniversary of the vote in the House on HR 810, the bill to lift the President’s restrictions on stem cell research.

“It has been 346 days since the House passed this bill with a strong bipartisan vote – *346 days!* It is supported by the majority of Senators on a bipartisan basis. It enjoys large majorities in every public opinion poll – which is hardly surprising, because stem-cell research holds tremendous promise for curing illnesses and saving lives.

“But one obstacle stands in the way: The Senate has squandered almost an entire year waiting for Majority Leader Bill Frist to make good on his pledge to bring HR 810 to the floor for a vote.

“The Hippocratic Oath says, “First, do no harm.” But, while suffering people are desperate for this research, Dr. Frist has refused to act.

“Next week has been designated as “health week” in the Senate. It is hard to believe that the Senate would consider a series of health bills next week without being allowed a vote to support stem-cell research. But that appears to be exactly what Senator Frist has in mind.

“I appreciate the fact that many Republican Senators have been very helpful and outspoken on this issue. Senators Specter, Hatch, and Smith, in particular, have urged the majority leader to bring up the bill. Senator Frist himself gave a speech last summer in which he endorsed HR 810. But, again and again, he has refused to schedule a vote.

“Well, my patience – and the patience of other Democratic Senators – has run out. So, today, we are taking the extraordinary step of sending a letter to the Majority Leader, formally calling on him to bring HR 810 to the floor.

“It’s no secret that the reason for the nearly one-year delay in bringing up this bill is because of political divisions within the Republican Party. And that’s a shame, because stem-cell research shouldn’t be a partisan issue.

“Make no mistake, if the Democrats were in charge in the Senate, we wouldn’t be holding this press conference, this morning. We would have brought HR 810 to the floor, passed it, and sent it to the President long ago.

“As I speak, people we love are dying from Parkinson’s and ALS. Children are suffering from juvenile diabetes. People are unable to walk due to spinal cord injuries. These people can’t wait another year for Senator Frist and his party to resolve their differences. They need help *now*.

“That’s why we will continue to push for a vote on HR 810 next week. And I urge people all across America to send their own letters and e-mails to Senator Frist demanding a vote on this absolutely critical bill.”

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